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SUBJECT: EGYPT SEEKS DETAILS ON FRENCH OFFER FOR MILITARY
COOPERATION TO GCC

Classified By: POL M/C David D. Pearce, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Under instructions from Cairo, Egyptian DCM Abu Bakr Hefny Mahnoud, called on Pol M/C Pearce and Poloff on October 24 to ask for information on a French-led initiative, in which the Italians along with several other Mediterranean countries participated, to increase military - military cooperation and/or arms sales with GCC countries. Pol M/C said we had not heard of the initiative, but would look into it. In a subsequent phone conversation with Italian MFA NATO Office Director, he confirmed the French had led an exploratory mission to evaluate opportunities for security and defense cooperation with GCC nations and that the Italians had participated as an observer. End Summary.

12. (C) Egyptian DCM Mahnoud asked if we had heard anything about a French initiative to sell arms or increase defense cooperation with GCC countries. He said the French initiative was not related to NATO or the EU, but had been supported by Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal.

13. (C) MFA NATO Office Director Minister Gianni Bardini confirmed to Poloff in an October 24 telephone conversation there had been a mission to explore options for increased security and defense cooperation with GCC countries in mid-September which the French had sponsored, independently of the EU and NATO, and in which Italy had participated, along with several other European countries, as an observer. Bardini said the mission had been exploratory in nature and that the goal was to see whether there was an interest on the part of the GCC countries in exploring options for increasing security and defense cooperation in the form of joint exercises, training opportunities and/or exchange programs. He said the French had characterized the initiative as complementary to NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and not/not a duplication of efforts. The French-led delegation held talks with high-level interlocutors in GCC capitals who were receptive to the idea, but who also asked for clarification on how this initiative is different from NATO's ICI, and expressed some concern that the initiative complement and not compete with ongoing NATO ICI programs.

14. (C) Bardini emphasized the Italian desire not to see this initiative enter into competition with NATO's ICI and said the Italians had expressly asked the French to state their desire not to compete with ICI in their informal proposal. He said there have been no tangible outcomes from the visits thus far, stressing the exploratory nature of this first outreach.

15. (C) Comment. The Italians appear skeptical as to the initiative's ability to get off the ground, and more

importantly differentiate itself from NATO's ICI; but participated as an observer in an effort not to be left out in case it takes off. The Italians are staunch supporters of NATO's outreach in the region, and have confidence in NATO's proven track record of cooperation with Med Dialogue countries. End Comment.
SPOGLI